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## CHAPTER II

## INFANCY

854 KWOMA infants[1] up to the time they are weaned are never far from their mothers. It is, in fact, very seldom that they are not actually in physical contact [595] with her. Having turned over most of her household duties to [602] her co-wife or some female relative, the mother may hold the child all day and give it her undivided attention. She sits either on the earth floor or on a bark slab under the porch of the family dwelling with the baby nestling on her outstretched legs. At night the infant sleeps cuddled by her side. Whenever she has to move, she carries the child with her cradled in her arm, sitting on her neck, or, less frequently, straddling her hip. The hours that she spends sitting, however, far outnumber the total time spent in standing or walking around with the baby. This is especially true during the first few months, when she considers it dangerous to the child's health to leave the house. If the child appears robust at the end of three or four months, the mother may venture out to the house of a neighbor to visit and show off her infant, but she will not go beyond the limits of the hamlet [754] until the fontanel hardens. This precaution results from the belief that infants are especially susceptible to sorcery before this time and that they should therefore not be subjected to [594] undue risks. For the same reason any visitor except a close relative is unwelcome in a house where there is a newborn [123] infant. Two children were born in the hamlet during my stay, but I was not allowed to see either of them until they were about three months old.[2]

853 Hunger produces one of the earliest and most persistently

[1] The infants from whom most of the data were obtained were Yat's son Njan, who was born a few weeks after my arrival, Way's son Kadowan, who was born a few weeks after Njan, and Suw, the son of War, an infant who was slightly over three years of age, but retarded by yaws and malaria.

[2] This made the observation of infants extremely difficult and accounts in large part for the paucity of data in this chapter.

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recurring discomforts that an infant experiences. The mother 853
keeps her breast constantly available, so that for the most part the infant is able to satisfy this drive by merely exercising the innate sucking reflex. He does learn, however, that certain preliminary behavior is useful in bringing satisfaction more quickly and efficiently. He learns to turn his head to take the nipple in his mouth, to stop sucking from one breast when it becomes dry, and finally even to lift himself from a prone position to a vantage point from which he can suckle. Suw, one of the older infants of the hamlet, had learned to do all these things very adeptly. Kadowan and Njan, whom I first observed when they were three months old, depended almost entirely on the mother to lift them to the proper position, to help them get the nipple into the mouth, and to change the breast for them at the proper time. Nevertheless they already manifested some of these instrumental acts in incipient form.

Suw, who was almost old enough to be weaned, had learned 854 •
to grasp other objects besides his mother's breast and to put 856
them into his mouth. At times he even crawled about the porch floor in order to examine things which caught his interest. One of his first responses to these objects was to lift them to his mouth. Compared to ourselves, the Kwoma are exceptionally permissive toward this type of behavior. I once saw Suw with the blade of a twelve-inch bush knife in his mouth and the adults present paid no attention to him. As a result of such trial-and-error investigations, the child learns to discriminate between the edible and inedible. Mother's beads, father's adz, or brother's pith ball not only do not satisfy hunger but sometimes even hurt one's mouth.

Toward the end of infancy the Kwoma mother begins to 862
prepare her child for weaning by introducing foods other than milk into the diet. At first she bends over and transfers masticated food from her mouth into that of her child. Later she gives him a spoonful of soup or a bit of gruel. Even infants as young as Kadowan and Njan were given a small piece of pork to chew on; this probably served both as nourishment and as a pacifier.

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the general permissive attitude which a mother exhibits toward her infant suggests that she may also allow it freedom to discover this mode of gratification. On the other hand, the fact that older children are not permitted to masturbate in public might influence the mother to prohibit this type of behavior in her infant as well. The fact that both Kum and Merik, boys who were in the weaning period, fingered their genitals without being punished suggests a permissive attitude toward masturbation as perhaps the more plausible assumption. 864

Although a mother tries to protect her infant from pain inflicted by the natural environment, frequent experience with suffering is unavoidable. It is practically impossible for her to ward off the clouds of hungry mosquitoes that are continually present. The extreme temperature variations are often unpleasant. In the afternoon, with humidity at a maximum and the temperature around ninety degrees, the heat is stifling. By contrast, a damp foggy morning with the temperature at seventy is uncomfortably cold; I would shiver in a thick sweater while the natives huddled by their fires. Teething is another source of pain which every infant must endure. Yaws and malaria are prevalent diseases at Kwoma. Informants told me that no one ever grows up without contracting the former. Certainly few youths or adults can be seen who do not bear scars of yaws sores. The infant's physiological immaturity makes him for the most part dependent on his mother to help him cope with these natural pains just as he depends on her to feed him. 854 • [136] [132] [164]

Crying is selected as the most effective response which a Kwoma infant can make both to pain and to hunger. It constitutes an injunction to the mother to discover the source of the trouble. Her first response is to present the breast. If this fails to quiet him, she tries something else. If she believes that the child is crying because he is too hot, she moves him away from the heat of her body. If she thinks he is cold, she cuddles him. If his crying calls her attention to a mosquito on him, she brushes it off and scratches the bite. If she suspects that sores from yaws are hurting him, she tries to move

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854 him into a more comfortable position. If he seems to be crying because he is sick, she tries to distract his attention by
[524] crooning to him, rocking him gently, and patting him. One mother, by putting a stone in a tin can, had invented a rattle which she used in these circumstances. Each time a mother reacts to her child's crying by discovering and removing the source of discomfort, she rewards this response in her child. The situation in Kwoma is such that, for the young infant, crying is followed by the alleviation of pain more frequently than is any other response.

When the infant begins to talk, he learns an even more efficient technique for securing help. A mother does not always know the trouble when her infant cries, but his words elicit immediate and appropriate help. A Kwoma infant who has learned to speak may say, "Mother, my back itches," or
[861] "I am cold; warm me." The mother rewards these demands by removing the source of discomfort. This indicates one of the advantages of learning language and hence why an infant is motivated to do so.

856 Thus during infancy the response to discomfort which is most strongly established is that of seeking help by crying or asking for it. Responses such as approaching the breast, moving to avoid pains, and other independent acts are also established. They form a basis for later learning, but hold a less important position in the response repertory of an infant than that of seeking help.

854 A motive which becomes strongly established during infancy is the wish to be near to and touch the mother. Almost all the pains and discomforts which an infant experiences are reduced while he is either sitting in his mother's lap or lying by her side. He is fed there, he sleeps there, and he is warmed and cooled, scratched and petted there—always while in bodily contact with his mother. The following case indicates the strong attachment that an infant has for his
854 mother's lap and how loath he is to leave it. Mbora one after-
866 noon was teaching her infant son Suw to venture from her lap. She was rolling a ball a little way from her and then

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putting Suw down and gently urging him to retrieve it. He crawled a few feet toward the ball and then returned to his mother. She took him back into her lap and rocked him in her arms and patted him for a while. She then asked someone for the ball and let Suw play with it. Then she rolled it away again and told him to go get it. This time he retrieved the ball and was again rewarded. During weaning, as we shall see, the strength of this desire to touch and be near the mother is even more clearly demonstrated.

An infant's reaction to the social environment is pleasant but limited. Except for smearing he is rarely punished.[a] Since, moreover, almost all his needs are satisfied by the help of his mother, he inevitably develops a strong attachment to her. By comparison, other persons are relatively unimportant in his life. His father sometimes picks him up and holds him for a few minutes to display him to a visitor, but he soon returns the child to his mother, especially if he starts to cry. A mother never entrusts her young infant to an older brother or sister to hold, even for a short while, unless she is near to supervise. Next to the mother herself, her co-wife cares for a child more frequently than any other person. It is she who usually holds the infant when the mother needs a short respite from the constant care. The only other persons who are allowed to touch the child are its grandparents, its father's *brothers* and *sisters*, its *mother's brothers*, and the spouses of these persons; but to be held by them is a rare occurrence. The mother stands out as by far the most important figure in the infant's life—a person essential to his very existence.

Sickness is the chief source of anxiety for a Kwoma infant. The mother, successful in bringing about the reduction of other discomforts, knows no efficient means of coping with most of the diseases which her child contracts. Indeed, one method employed to cure minor ills increases the infant's pain instead of reducing it. If he complains of a headache

[a] Masturbation and biting the mother's nipple may be two other exceptions to the rule of complete facilitation. All informants stated firmly that an infant is never punished.

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854 757 or stomach-ache, the mother cuts the skin on his temple or belly and allows blood to flow from the wound.[6] In this sphere, therefore, an infant experiences pain without anticipating any possibility of its reduction except by slow and natural means.

854 865 Very few aggressive responses are established during infancy. The infant is not big or strong enough to alleviate pains by removing the source. Loud crying is, however, established at this time. A parent will say, "The infant is cross."[6] Nevertheless, a mother helps her infant even if he is crying angrily. In fact, the louder he cries, the more effort she expends trying to aid him, so that aggression is rewarded rather than punished. Infants also gain some success in the technique of killing mosquitoes, an act classed as aggression in Kwoma culture.[7]

858 As regards prestige, the Kwoma infant enjoys in a sense the most dominant social position that he will ever attain. His every command is obeyed, and all his wants are attended to. For the remainder of his life he can only expect to have his commands obeyed after he has, by the expenditure of considerable effort, gained a position of high prestige.

[753]

[6] Such pains are supposed to be caused by an accumulation of bad blood. This theory will be described below. See chap. iv, p. 61.

[6] *Wejowa*, "to be cross"; or *owambato*, "to speak angrily."

[7] The Kwoma term for killing a mosquito is *yogisa fiju*, "to fight a mosquito." *Fiju*, "to fight," is the general term for aggression.

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the hands of a sorcerer. As soon as the mother is able, she takes care of the baby and nurses it.[40] Both parents show special concern for the child until his fontanel closes,[41] as they believe that he is particularly susceptible to sorcery during this time. For this reason the mother stays at home and does not receive visitors. The father, in order to insure the child's safety during this period, does not chew betel, or scratch himself except with a stick, and he holds his cigarettes between tweezers.[42]

Under certain circumstances, when the parents do not wish to bring up an infant, they may either offer it for adoption or kill it. If a woman gives birth to a monstrosity, she disposes of it as soon as it is born. She treats one of twins in the same way. Parents may decide not to bring up a normal child when there are already several children of one sex in the family and the new baby is of the same sex. If the children are all girls, for example, there will be no one to inherit the land nor to protect and care for the parents in their old age, so the mother may offer for adoption or kill a new girl infant in order to free herself more quickly to produce another child with the hope that it be a boy. Similarly, a boy infant may be killed or offered for adoption if the previous children are all male, since it will be very difficult to obtain sufficient shell money to pay for their wives if they have no sisters. The optimal family, therefore, is one in which boys and girls are equally balanced. Infanticide and adoption are employed to approximate this ratio.

The mother has full responsibility for the immediate physical care of her offspring during infancy. For the first few months she permits no one else to handle the infant, but after this she allows her co-wife to give her short respites. She may permit the father, uncle, or aunt to hold the infant for a few moments for their amusement, but she rarely intrusts it to

[40] The above information was obtained from male informants and hence is incomplete and not necessarily reliable.

[41] Informants described this as "when the baby's heart stops beating on the top of his head."

[42] A man observes these same taboos when he plants yams.

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854 an older sibling and then only under her direct supervision.
593 The father's duty with respect to the well-being of his infant
[754] is primarily to take special precautions against sorcery and to be ready to issue a strong anti-sorcery protest the moment the infant becomes ill. Unless he has a second wife or daughter old enough to work, he may have to cook his own meals, process sago flour alone, and make some reciprocal arrangements with the wife or daughter of a brother to supply his
[853] household with wood or water. The mother may not indulge in sexual intercourse during the infancy of her offspring lest she be forced to wean it while it is, according to Kwoma standards, too young. Thus the birth of an infant necessitates considerable changes in the habits of both its father and its mother and is a burden to them as well as a promised asset. Despite this, Kwoma parents may not express annoyance at these frustrations by hurting the infant in any way; they may not even punish it except very mildly and only under the circumstances which have been described. This prohibition seems to be effected more by the fact that it is incompatible with the strong wish for children than by any direct sanctions.

593 It is not necessary to repeat here the details of the behavior of Kwoma parents toward their child as he passes through the various stages from infancy to adulthood, since these facts may be inferred from previous chapters. It may simply be stated, however, that the parents take the final responsibility for their child's well-being and for teaching him to behave in the way that the culture dictates as right and proper.
[626] Parents who neglect their children are censured by other
[684] members of the hamlet. Takawur, for example, had to flee from the tribe after he attempted to rape War's wife. He left his young son, Gwamp, behind him at Kwoma. Way, Takawur's brother, took care of Gwamp. Although the event had occurred several years before, Takawur is still criticized for not providing for his son, whereas the rape is now no longer held against him.

603 Although a *brother* is separated from his *sister* when the
[591] latter marries and moves away from the hamlet, they con-

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The market at which Kwoma women are trading their surplus of sago flour for fish brought by the river natives. The woman in the foreground is Marok's sister, Uka, holding a lump of sago flour in each hand. See Chapter VI, pages 119–120. The scars on her chest and around her navel are those she received as a mark of adulthood. See Chapter VI, page 106.

578 and telling her that she was no good and that he thought he would drive her out of the house or spear her. I asked Mey if he liked Chinuwa, and he said no; he was afraid of being sorcerized too.

593 Then he told me of War who had been sorcerized by his second wife.
595 He had speared her in the leg and cut her with a bamboo on the arm, and
754 after that she was good. He was careful to spear her in the leg so as not to kill her. According to Mey, this often happened in the case of the no. 2 wife. The first wife usually loved her husband and did not sorcerise him. This also is what happened if one married a woman, and she did not marry her husband of her own free will.

000 Now, a couple of hours later, Wof has just come up to the house and seems in excellent spirits. He hugged Mamb, went up and greeted Mamb's wife, and came in where I was writing. He then went out and sat glumly in the cook house.

753 February 4, 1937. Wof came up today with a big sick. His head and stomach were pained, and he asked for medicine. He had no fever, but looked pale. Someone was sorcerising him (this might have been predicted from yesterday). I tried to pump Mey, but he was no help about yesterday's business.

123 I went to see Marok but found he had gone into the bush. Then I
[854] stopped in at "Grilly's" house. His wife was sitting on the porch with an infant girl in her lap asleep. She gave me a coconut. The "lapun" in the next house was working something from a cassowary bone. His wife was
[231] working on a fish net. They have three cats which they call puss.

Then I came back. A couple of women came by; they stopped and greeted me. I was doing card tricks for some children and told them to come in and watch. They giggled a bit and came in, stood in the doorway and